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SUBJECT: DEPUTY SRSG ON PROSPECTS FOR CPA

11. (SBU) Summary: CDA Fernandez met with Deputy SRSG Taye-Brook Zerioun December 2 to discuss the prospects for CPA implementation. A shrewd observer of Sudan and the region for many years, Zerioun is not overly concerned by the current crisis and believes war is unlikely. The parties are comfortable with their current arrangement and the next key event is the 2009 election, which can be organized with a minimum of fuss. Troop redeployments are essential however; both sides have been caught cheating with troops on each other's side of the border. End summary.

12. (SBU) UN Deputy SRSG for Sudan Taye-Brook Zerioun told CDA Fernandez December 2 that he believes a return to war in Sudan is unlikely. He bases his assessment on the fact that the parties, despite their constant bickering over process and details, are actually relatively comfortable with their current arrangement. Revenues have never been better for both sides and their status within the CPA guarantees them supremacy as the two primary political forces in Sudan. So the SPLM will soon return their Ministers to the Government of National Unity (GNU) under protest even if all their conditions are not met. The two sides are condemned to work together, "like a broken marriage that stays together for the kids." Zerioun said he would not want to be in the shoes of SPLM member Deng Alor, who is slated to take over as GNU Foreign Minister following the proposed cabinet reshuffle. "How will he function?" Zerioun asked rhetorically. "You can't disagree with the President every day," and if Alor refuses to play his role the President will simply bypass him and use his Presidential Advisor for Foreign Affairs as de facto Foreign Minister.

13. (SBU) Zerioun says the real watershed event in Sudan will be the 2009 election, which is in the interests of the National Congress Party (NCP) to retain its legitimacy, and which Zerioun believes can be organized quickly and "with a minimum of fuss." Zerioun believes the SPLM will not be able to recreate the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) in order to oust the NCP from power. Therefore the SPLM's only choice is to partner with the NCP in elections, or look to independence in 2011. However, Zerioun expressed doubt that the SPLM will look toward separation when they see what is required - the infinite number of details which must be negotiated and managed to become an independent state - not to mention selling the policy to regional partners, none of whom want to see an independent Southern Sudan. In 2009 the SPLM's only option is to run on a unity platform, and their best chance of remaining a national power and protecting their interests in the CPA is to partner with the NCP. Otherwise they risk opening the CPA to renegotiation and dilution under another coalition, or if the NCP seeks another coalition of political alliances. However the NCP is even less interested in opening the CPA to renegotiation because it wants to keep other "Northern" parties marginalized.

14. (SBU) Zerioun observed that nothing the NCP does with regard to slowing down CPA implementation is in its own interests. CDA Fernandez agreed, noting that most observers see clearly that the NCP

is brilliant tactically but short-sighted strategically. Zerioun said he believes this is because the NCP thrives when it is in crisis mode, a behavior learned in its struggle to remain in power for the last 18 years. The NCP pursues a strategy of "war by other means" with the SPLM, seeking to weaken its opponent and partner but without any intention of returning to war despite the rhetoric. The NCP's strategy is to tire and frustrate its opponent through attrition, and the SPLM's only card at the moment is escalation. However, the SPLM should recognize that its greatest weapon in this struggle is the 2009 election. The SPLM can deliver votes for unity in exchange for a better deal on Abyei or other issues. Unfortunately the SPLM is currently afraid of the election because they don't have the same resources and organizational capacity, and because they know that under the census it will be clear that the South only has 8, at most 10 million people, far less than the thirty percent they are hoping for - something more in the range of twenty five percent or less is likely.

15. (SBU) Zerioun predicted that more small-scale clashes are likely, like the recent fighting at Malakal. However this fighting will remain localized. The key to ensure stability and reduce unnecessary casualties is the redeployment of troops. Zerioun noted that the SPLM has agreed to military withdrawals from the Nuba Mountains and Blue Nile, where it was cheating on numbers of soldiers across the border and now has been caught by the UN monitoring team. Zerioun predicted that the SAF will also eventually redeploy from North Bahr al Ghazal and Unity States. (Comment: Though full redeployment from the oil-rich areas is unlikely to happen quickly, and Northern-controlled GNU petroleum police will likely remain.) The SPLA withdrawal from border areas in the North will present them with a major internal political problem as it will have to "abandon" some of its most faithful constituencies.

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16. (SBU) Comment: Zerioun is one of the most prescient observers of Sudanese politics currently residing in Khartoum. An Ethiopian, he is from the region and was responsible for Sudan and the Horn of Africa from UN headquarters before this assignment. We agree with his assessments, especially of Northern interests and strategy, but what he did not address is the possibility that the SPLM will implode. The pressure of organizing elections, administering its territory, and trying to manage its strained relationship with the North while maintaining cohesion in its own ranks is a tremendous challenge. Thus the North's tactic of "war by other means" could lead to dangerous and unanticipated consequences if some of the "6,000 captains" that SPLM SG Amun has expressed concern about become frustrated and decide to take matters into their own hands or break from the SPLM. Zerioun's bottom line of "expect more of the same tension, bickering and dysfunctionality" between the SPLM and NCP for the next 2-4 years is probably right.

FERNANDEZ